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THE SOCIAL CONDITION  
OF  
THE BLIND,

AN ESSAY BY  
D. O. HASWELL.

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“He that is stricken blind cannot forget  
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost.”  
*Romeo and Juliet*, act i

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SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED.

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PRICE SIXPENCE.

(POST-FREE ON RECEIPT OF SIX STAMPS.)

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TO BE HAD OF THE AUTHOR,  
AT 49, GREEK STREET, SOHO, LONDON, W.

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Any further contributions will be devoted for a similar purpose.

## NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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IN 1874, being asked to contribute a paper to a Society which held monthly meetings for the discussion of social questions, and to which I had previously contributed two other papers, it occurred to me that the social condition of the blind was a subject that required ventilation. I accordingly prepared a paper on that subject, which I read from *memory* on the 9th of June in that year. The Society thought it worthy of insertion in their journal, and subsequently some members of the Council subscribed to have it reprinted in the form of a pamphlet. Altogether about 2,000 copies have been distributed. Having received many enquiries after it, and some friends having kindly offered to subscribe towards the cost of printing, I have prepared the present edition, which has been entirely re-written, and deals more comprehensively with the subject.

It has been written with an earnest desire to serve the cause of the blind, who are generally too helpless to plead for themselves, and whose pitiable condition, starved alike in body and mind, vegetating but not living, often the prey of adventurers, crushed, degraded, and oppressed, is simply a disgrace to a country calling itself Christian or civilised.



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# The Social Condition of the Blind.

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THE following pages, although few in number, are the result of a long and careful enquiry, extending over several years. It happened that on the 1st of September, 1866, I was thrown from the outside of an omnibus, by the too common practice of the driver in going on too soon; in falling, my head came in contact with the stones, and I was picked up bleeding from a wound on the temple, and suffering from concussion of the brain. There resulted from that such a derangement of the retina and optic nerve that I became nearly blind. Oculists were consulted in vain, and I found myself, in the prime of life, shut out from nearly everything that makes life desirable. The business I had carried on for some years was of an artistic character, involving the employment of colours, and of course demanding keen powers of vision, and in which I believe I may say I had attained some little celebrity.

Although I had a small staff of assistants about me, I had grave doubts at the time whether I should be able successfully to continue that business, and I naturally became anxious about the future. Some friends having suggested that I might find some useful channel of employment in connection with some of the Blind Institutions of the Metropolis, it was with some vague idea of this kind in my head that I at first commenced an enquiry into the nature and operations of such institutions, and the condition of the blind generally. This enquiry has gone on from that time to the present, and it will still go on. I have spared no pains in pursuing it. I have mixed freely with the blind, and often conversed with them. I have visited

their educational, Bible, and reading classes. I have been with them in summer excursions and at Christmas social gatherings. I have visited such institutions as were accessible, obtained their reports when possible, which I have carefully studied, and I have generally attended all public meetings held on behalf of the blind. The revelation acquired in this way has filled me with pain and astonishment, to think that in a land calling itself Christian, in a nation abounding in wealth and benevolence, so many of the blind should be left to endure such extreme poverty and such cruel persecutions; this too, notwithstanding that a very large sum (certainly not less than £140,000) is annually expended, professedly for their welfare. Prior to the census of 1851, no correct estimate could be formed of the actual number of the blind, and it therefore follows that all institutions or bequests devised prior to that date were founded in entire ignorance of the large number that would have to be considered. That census revealed to us the fact that in the whole of the United Kingdom there were not less than 27,074 persons suffering under the heavy affliction of blindness. Ten years later that number was found to have increased by more than 2,000, the number then being given as 29,248. Another ten years passed away, and again there was found an increase of nearly 2,000, the numbers given by the census of 1871 being 31,159, viz.: England, 20,106, Wales, 1484, Ireland, 6347, Scotland, 3021, Channel Islands, 201. Total 31,159. Blindness is more prevalent in Ireland than in other parts of the Kingdom; the ratio to the sighted being 1 in 864, while it is about 1 per thousand in other parts of the kingdom. It is less than that in the Metropolis, and is more prevalent in the agricultural than in the manufacturing districts. The number of children born blind is comparatively small, being somewhere between six and eight per cent. The blind may be broadly divided into three great classes, and the first of these classes into two sections, the first section comprising those who being possessed of private



property, are not affected in a pecuniary sense by the calamity ; the second section, those who having established themselves in business before the calamity overtook them, are still supported by that business.

At the other end of the scale there is a large class who subsist on public charity, and may therefore be termed public paupers, and between these two extremes there is another class, who may be termed private paupers, who, failing to support themselves are thrown upon the kindness and charity of relations and friends. It is of course not possible to give anything like exact numbers in each class, but from careful enquiries I have made, I am satisfied that the pauper class, public and private, are not less than 22,000. A large number of the humbler class, by reason of their affliction, become reduced to a condition of the most abject poverty, and not only suffer the extreme of wretchedness, but are also exposed to the most cruel persecutions ; indeed, if the facts were generally known, they would cause the blush of shame to mantle on every cheek, and every manly heart to throb with honest indignation. As a specimen of the cruelty to which the blind poor of London are exposed by the operations of the Mendicity Society, I give the following extract *verbatim* from the *Morning Standard* of May 27, 1874 :

“MIDDLESEX SESSIONS.—*A Case for Commiseration.*—William Hawkes, a blind man, and very infirm, was brought up, having been committed from Marlborough-street, to be dealt with as a rogue and vagabond. On being placed in the dock, Mr. Montagu Williams, as *amicus curiæ*, said he had known the prisoner for years from seeing him sitting on Waterloo-bridge, tracing his fingers over a book designed for the blind to read, and in no instance had he seen him beg from those who passed by, so that he was practically doing no harm, and some time ago the late Sir William Bodkin had dealt very mercifully with him. Something ought to be done for him. Mr. Harris said he could corroborate all that his learned friend had stated ; that the prisoner had never annoyed persons passing by by begging of

them. He had lately seen him standing near the National Gallery with his hat before him—if any one chose to drop a copper into it—but he never solicited alms of them. The Assistant Judge said the prisoner had been convicted by the magistrate, and was sent here to be sentenced as a rogue and vagabond, but the Court would not deal harshly with him. Horsford, chief officer of the Mendicity Society, said the prisoner had been frequently convicted for begging. The Assistant Judge sentenced him to be imprisoned for four months.”

Any comment on the above would be superfluous. Similar cases frequently occur, but they do not generally find their way into the papers, and the public know nothing about them. Magistrates would not be guilty of such barbarity towards unfortunate human beings whose only crime is that of being blind and poor, if they knew how little existing institutions really did for the blind. One only, in the whole of the Metropolis, provides board and lodging for a limited number of adults, and these only on condition that they are paid for. To the reader who may say, “Well, there is the workhouse,” I answer, the workhouse is sufficiently repulsive to any one, but is much worse than this to the blind. Shut out, as they are, from observation, and the solace of books, they need, more than any, access to society. I have spoken with some of the blind who have been immured in the workhouse for a short time, and they have told me they felt that they should go mad if they stopped there. I believe a large per-centage of the blind become insane, but I have never been able to get any reliable statistics. I was told by the conductor of a blind class that during a period of seven years, as many as eight or nine of his class had to be placed in lunatic asylums. Deprived of the healthy stimulus of society, and without a supply of intellectual food, the minds of the blind must become impaired, and I submit that society has no right to doom them to such conditions of life as are likely to destroy the noble gift of reason. In this



country, with its abundant wealth and immense resources, no national provision has ever been made for the wants of the blind. All this has been left to the exercise of private charity, and most miserably has private charity failed. A large amount of benevolence has certainly been exercised; many very estimable persons have frequently met, subscribed liberally, and devised well-meaning schemes. This benevolence has been often exhibited in the erection of a building in which a few unhappy blind persons are to be imprisoned at an immense cost.

Consider how much money is here wasted. First, there is the purchase of the land, with a large sum for the cost of conveyance; then the architect's costly plans; then the builder's estimate, with the inevitable long bill for extras; then comes the furnishing, and the appointment of a staff of salaried officials. The whole thing, as regards the true interests of the blind, is a gross and lamentable blunder. Such institutions are not only costly in practice, but they are also false in theory; they must increase the misery of the blind by adding to the imprisonment that nature has already put upon them. The benevolence of the public has been chiefly directed to schools for the young, workshops for the adults, and pensions for the aged. It is much to be regretted that more has not been done in the way of pensions, the best and cheapest mode of assisting the blind. The money in this case really gets to them with a comparatively small expense for distribution. The total amount paid in pensions last year was only £20,497 6s., while the aggregate outlay in other directions was somewhere about £120,000. It will surprise the reader to be informed that the latter sum, large as it is, actually reaches a smaller number of the blind than the former; the number relieved by pensions last year was 2,263. The number relieved, employed, and educated by institutions would fall short of this by at least 100, and the majority of these received a pittance so miserably small that it would be simply ludicrous if it were not so sad. Think

of these figures and consider what a monstrous waste of money here goes on. Think too, how many thousands are left untouched, and then, I ask, how can they exist without begging, and why should this be considered a crime when society has done nothing for them? Many so-called institutions for the blind are mere pretences for affording luxurious homes to sighted officials who take the lion's share of the plunder, the amount that really gets to the blind bearing even a less proportion to the whole than did Falstaff's half-pennyworth of bread to all that large quantity of sack. It is necessary to notice here that the above estimates, both as to cost and numbers, do not include what are known as home teaching societies.

The total number of blind institutions in the kingdom is between 50 and 60. There are 2 in Wales, 5 in Ireland, 6 in Scotland, and 33 in various parts of England, making a total of 46, exclusive of those in the Metropolis, which I prefer to treat of separately. These 46 institutions have an aggregate income of £82,349, while the total number of blind persons educated, employed, and relieved by them is only 1,113! This shows the cost per head per annum to be over £73. My authority for this statement is "A Guide to the Charities for the Blind," by Mansfield Turner, published by Hardwicke, 1871.

I now proceed to give some account as the result of my own experience of six institutions in London, whose aggregate income is about £30,000. Two of these are chiefly educational, three are industrial, and the other sends Scripture-readers to visit the blind at their own homes, and also gives a small amount of relief in money, bread, and coals. In dealing with the balance-sheets of these societies I shall omit all mention of shillings and pence, as they serve no useful purpose, and only tend to confuse the mind of the reader. As I am without sufficient sight for reading, I am compelled to write chiefly from memory, and therefore round numbers is the easiest thing for myself. It may also be proper to explain why I take the balance-



sheets of 1873 instead of those of last year. One reason is that I have been unable to obtain more than two of the latter, and I think it fairer to treat all from the same point of time. I believe no material difference has taken place since then, and therefore I may as well adopt the easier method of taking those I have already mastered and described, making such additional remarks as any further knowledge of the subject may qualify me to give.

First:—The St. George's School for the Indigent Blind was established in Southwark in 1799. It receives pupils of both sexes between the ages of 10 and 20, who usually remain six or seven years. The admission is by election, no payment being required. In addition to the usual branches of education, the pupils are instructed in certain humble handicrafts, with the view to enable them to earn their own living after they leave the school, and if any exhibit a taste for music, they have special lessons by competent masters, with the same object in view. Ten blind adults are also found employment in the workshops; they work by the piece, and are stated to earn from 12s. to 18s. per week. After a careful study of the report for 1873, I am unable to determine from that what the real income is; not one but a number of balance-sheets are given, and various sums are transferred from one to another in such a remarkable way that the effect is very confusing. I therefore fall back upon Mansfield Turner, who states the income of this institution for 1869 to be £10,237. The number of pupils varies from 150 to 160. Assuming the average to be 155, and that they are in the school  $6\frac{1}{2}$  years, the total cost of each would be £409, or about £63 per annum. This estimate is made after deducting £390 for wages paid to the ten adults, for which I have allowed 15s. per week for each. What result do we get for an expenditure of £409 on each of these young persons? Enquiries are made about each pupil some time after leaving school, and answers required to certain questions. The replies are inserted in each year's

report, and reveal the most melancholy results. Of the total number who left in 1873, only seven were found able to earn anything, and the average earnings of the seven were only 7s. 6d. per week, while the majority are so helpless as to earn nothing. An examination of four years reports was published some years ago by one well acquainted with the blind, and revealed the astounding fact that only twenty were found who could earn anything, the average earnings of these twenty being certainly under 8s. per week. When we consider the income, and that four years were thus occupied, this question presents itself: Is it necessary to spend £40,000 in enabling twenty blind people to earn 8s. per week? This ought to be a convincing proof of the costliness and uselessness of such institutions.

Second :—The London Association for Teaching the Blind to Read, and for Training them in Industrial Occupations, was founded in 1838 in the Avenue-road, St. John's Wood. The report for 1873 shews that 66 pupils resided in the house while five attend as day pupils. One section of the pupils pay £20 per year, another section £15, and a third are admitted gratuitously by election. The expenditure for the year is £2,320; this is exceedingly moderate, and shows the cost of each pupil to be little more than half the cost at St. George's. In addition to the usual branches of instruction, music is made a prominent feature. Basket and brushmaking are also taught, and the embossed books used in the school are made on the premises. There is no doubt that the Institution is well and economically conducted; but it is on the exile principle, and experience has shewn that this system does not fully develope the powers of the blind.

Third :—The London Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind was established in 1854 to afford daily employment to the adult blind; Miss Gilbert, daughter of the late Bishop of Chichester, and herself blind, generously giving a donation of £2,000.



This Institution has attained considerable dimensions, the balance sheet for 1873 shewing an expenditure of £8,317. It occupied for many years large premises in the Euston Road, but has lately removed to 28, Berners Street. I am sorry to have to say, that when I sent a polite note to the Secretary, informing him that I was writing an article on the blind and requesting the favour of a report, my request was refused on the plea that the Manager was unwell. Supposing that instead of asking for a report I had offered a donation, would that have been refused on the same ground? I subsequently ascertained that the *London Mirror* of June 6th, 1874, contained an abstract of the report, and from that Journal I extract the following particulars. 37 adults of both sexes are employed in the Institution in the making of baskets, brushes, mats, firewood, &c., and 37 others are supplied with work at their own homes, some others receiving small commissions for acting as salesmen or agents, and 21 who are past work receive pensions varying from £5 to £15 12s. This Society has also established some Evening Reading Classes.

The following table is given of the earnings of the other workers:—

8 earn from 21s. to 25s. per week.			
17	„	16s. to 20s.	„
13	„	12s. to 15s.	„
10	„	6s. to 11s.	„
and 43	„	3s. to 5s.	„

This makes the number of workers to be 91; there is here some discrepancy, but I will give the Institution the benefit of the doubt, and assume that 91 is the number of Blind employed. The 37 who work at their own homes are chiefly employed at basket making, and have, as I am informed, to find their own materials; making a reasonable deduction for this, the average wage would appear to be about 9s. per week. This is certainly more liberal than we generally find in similar Institutions, but the cost of each worker is enormous, being £91 8s. 6d. This

would be somewhat reduced by deducting the amount paid in gifts and pensions ; but this I am unable to do as the report does not give it ; indeed, I have to complain that the balance sheet is ingeniously made up to prevent the reader from knowing too much. Rent and salaries are lumped together, so that we do not know how much is paid for the latter, some of the items appear at first sight quite astounding, and when sufficiently analysed, offer a curious revelation. The report states that the blind work so slowly, that, in order to give them a decent wage, they must be paid twice the value of their labour ; and for this purpose the contributions of the benevolent are solicited. There is much truth in the statement, yet we find that although the number employed in the workshops is only 37, the cost of materials and goods has reached the astounding sum of £3,340. The explanation, however, is very easy when you are once in the secret, and this is what it means. The calamity of the afflicted is made a pretence for soliciting the contributions of the benevolent ; and with the capital thus raised a large trading establishment is carried on, in which goods in large quantities are bought ready made and sold to the public as the product of the blind. What is the inevitable result of such a system ? The manager looks more to business than to philanthropy, finding more profit to be obtained from buying rather than from making, he naturally seeks to diminish the number of blind workers, and to give them as little to do as possible, and thus the employment of the sighted rather than the blind becomes the chief object of the Institution, and thus the original purpose becomes perverted.

Fourth :—The Alexandra Institution, for Improving the Condition of the Blind, was established in Queen Square in 1863. My first acquaintance with this Society began in the following manner. I went to the Hanover Square Rooms about five or six years ago, to attend its annual meeting ; on entering I found a numerous and fashionable assemblage ; Prince Teck



was in the chair, Bishops and Lords were on the platform, and everything was being done in rose water style and made to look very pleasant. I believe the first impression of a stranger on listening to the speeches that were being delivered would have been that it was rather a privilege than otherwise to be blind, so great and manifold were the blessings that would accrue to you from the operation of this Society; but I had gone there for the purpose of testing the truth of certain statements that had been made to me; and I noted carefully the figures in the Secretary's report. It happened that a short time before this I heard in the same room Mr. Bellew read that famous piece of satire, known as the "Charity Dinner, on the Anniversary of the Society for sending out Blankets and Top Boots to the Indians," and I well remember the droll way in which he put the very small amount expended in the purchase of Blankets and Top Boots, and the very large amount that went for the working expenses. And now, as I listen to the report of the Alexandra Institute, it occurs to me that I am being treated to another edition of the Blankets and Top Boots. A great deal of piety is infused into the report, and I have generally found much ostentatious piety to be usually accompanied by a corresponding want of honesty; there are many expressions of thankfulness to the Almighty who has showered down such blessings upon them, and enabled them to do so much for the blind, and this was the so much; 31 blind adults of both sexes had been found daily employment in the usual humble handicrafts, and had received collectively, as wages, about £240. Now this sum divided between 31 is rather less than £8 to each, or about 3s. per week, and to achieve the magnificent feat of paying a wage of 3s. per week to 31 blind persons, the Society had found it necessary to spend about £2,000. Some two or three years after, I obtained a report for the year ending April 1873, and, on consulting this I find the blanket and top boot principle to be still in operation. The receipts have now increased to

£2,848, the workers to 39, and the wages paid to £325, or 11 per cent., only, out of the gross receipts; and even this has been returned, for the goods sold amount to £470. The average wage is only 3s. 2d per week, while the annual cost of each worker is over £73. Of the 39, 10 reside at their own homes and come daily to the workshops, the other 29 live in the Institution, but are not supported by it, they are required to pay, the males 12s. and the females 10s. per week; this must amount in round numbers to something like £800 per annum, yet, strange to say, neither the receipt or expenditure of this large sum is accounted for on either side of the balance sheet. The St. John's Wood Society place the amount received as payment from boarders honestly and fairly in their balance sheet. What are we to think of the Managers of the Alexandra when they conceal it. Since the above was written I find the Alexandra Institution has closed its doors after an existence of 13 years.

Fifth:—The Surrey Association for the Blind is situated in the Albion Road, Peckham. Its operations are on a limited scale; the total expenditure for 1873 being only £516, and only nine blind adults being employed. The names of these are given at full length with the amount paid to each during the last year; this appears to average about £20. The cost of each worker being £57 6s. 8d., this it will be observed is much below the two other Industrial Institutions. It is quite refreshing to find a report so explicit and honest as this one is, and I desire to call attention to a very remarkable feature; the sale of the goods made by the blind is supplemented, though only to a moderate extent by other goods; the cost of the latter and the cost of material made up by the blind are placed in separate items. This is as it should be, and should be insisted on by the subscribers of other Institutions, who would then be able to see whether the labour of the blind is the chief object of the Institution. I will now put together the aggregate result of these three Industrial Institutions. Only 139 are found employment by an annual



expenditure of £11,681! The average weekly wage being 7s. 4d.!! While the average annual cost of each is £84 0s. 8d.!!!

Sixth:—The Indigent Blind Visiting and Relief Society was established in 1834. According to the report ending March 1874, the names of 638 blind persons were entered on the books; and the whole of these were visited periodically by eight scripture readers employed by the Society. They also receive in money 1s. per month and 5s. as a Christmas gift; one half-quartern loaf per week, and during four months of the winter a small supply of coals. The total value of these in 12 months I understand to be only 44s. I am not pointing this out with the idea of undervaluing the operations of this really useful Society. It is my duty to place facts before the reader so that he may know the real condition of the blind; to give even this miserable pittance to a large number involves a heavy annual outlay—the Society would be glad to give more if the public would only supply the necessary funds. The Society also gives a number of small pensions to the aged, and it has also a Samaritan fund for which, in time of sickness, the blind may receive several shillings weekly for a period of one or two months. This little help at such a time is most welcome, and helps to lighten the dark and heavy lot of many a poor sufferer. The office of the Society is at 27, Red Lion Square; there is a large class room in the same neighbourhood, and two or three other class rooms in different parts of London. Any of the blind who wish may receive gratuitous instruction. Two systems of embossed reading and a system of writing by points, the invention of Louis Braille, a blind Frenchman. The modest sum of threepence is allowed on each visit as guides money, and these small payments mount up in the year to something like £100. These classes, besides their educational advantages, also afford opportunities for social intercourse, which I believe to be productive of much good. In 1873, being then

ignorant of the Braille writing and desiring instruction, I presented myself at the class in Red Lion Square, and was received most courteously by Mr. Wm. Colmer, the Secretary, and Mr. Welch, the conductor of the class. I received the requisite instruction which I have since found of much use. One very remarkable feature of this Society is, that the officials are nearly all selected from the blind. Of the eight scripture readers, seven are blind, as are also the conductor and teachers of the classes and the secretary; and in this way all the money not required for rent and printing does really go to support the blind. The total expenditure of the year is £4,908, which seems to me exceedingly moderate considering the numerous channels in which it is always flowing. The balance sheet is clear and intelligible; the item for salaries moderate, and I think the Society deserves a larger share of public patronage.

There is also a Society whose function is different from any of the preceding six. The Home Teaching Society was established in London in 1855 for the purpose of lending to the blind portions of the Bible in Moon's embossed type; its plan of operation is exceedingly simple, London is mapped out into districts and a teacher or librarian appointed for each, whose business it is to find out the blind in his own district, give the required instruction, and call periodically and change the books. There are 16 of these teachers, 15 of whom are blind, and in this way the Society does much good by finding them employment. 52 other Societies have been started in other parts of the kingdom, which employ 63 more teachers. These branch societies, when well brought up and able to run alone, are left by the parent society to take care of themselves and manage their own affairs. I shall, in this instance, take the last report issued, which has been furnished me by the courtesy of Mr. Hibbert, the teacher for this district. This shows the total income to be £1,714 9s. 11d., and it is gratifying to find that more than half this sum has



been paid in wages to the blind teachers. The Secretary is evidently a man of good business talents, who has nothing to mystify or conceal; the balance sheet is clear and intelligible, the expenditure being given with the most explicit detail, and all the money being accounted for.

I will introduce here a sketch of the history of relief type, on which subject I have taken much pains to arrive at correct data. In 1784 a Frenchman, named Valentine Haüy, residing in Paris, produced the first book in relief type; its novelty excited much interest, and a considerable sum was subscribed for further printing, and the inventor was made Director of an Institution for the Blind. The neighbouring countries of Prussia and Germany soon took up the invention, and about 20 years after, at the command of the Emperor of Russia, Valentine Haüy went to St. Petersburg to superintend the production of similar books in the Russian language. He also paid a visit to Berlin with the like purpose. He returned to Paris after an absence of two years, and was afterwards succeeded by another Frenchman named Guillié, who made some alterations in the styles of letter. Neither style was suited to the sense of touch, and none ever will be so long as the sighted undertake this work, and ignore, as they generally have, the judgment of the blind. These books have now become obsolete, having been entirely superseded by the invention of Louis Braille, which I shall presently describe. Strange and incredible as it may seem, it is an actual fact that 42 years elapsed before anything of the kind was even thought of in any part of this Kingdom, and over 50 years before any books were in general use. In 1826, James Gall, a printer in Edinburgh, began to turn his attention to the intellectual education of the blind, and in the following year published a pamphlet on the subject. He also began to devise an alphabet, over which he spent several years; he issued a prospectus for the printing of the Gospel of St. John by subscription, the price being one guinea. In this he succeeded, and also

printed several other books of a religious character. In 1831 he paid a visit to London for the special purpose of introducing his book to the notice of the managers of the St. George's School for the Indigent Blind. He had the good sense to see that an alphabet suited to the sight was not best for the touch, but he also argued that it must not be departed from in any material degree, for the blind would have to depend on the sighted for instruction; he therefore adopted the general form of the roman letter with modifications, the chief feature being the conversion of the round part into angles. There was some truth in his idea, but after giving a careful examination to his alphabet, I am compelled to pronounce against it. Too much praise cannot be given to this gentleman for the devotion he brought to bear on this work, and the stimulus he gave to the movement generally. In 1832 the Council of the Edinburgh Society of Arts resolved to offer their gold medal for the best communication on the subject. This was kept open until 1835, and brought 19 competitors. The Council had no previous experience, and they wisely sought the advice and assistance of others. They used great deliberation in making the award, which was deferred until the 31st of May, 1837, when the medal was awarded to Dr. Fry, of London, chiefly on the recommendation of the Rev. W. Taylor, superintendent of the Blind School at York, and Mr. Alston, of Glasgow. The letter of Dr. Fry was the roman capital divested of its serifs or terminations, and books in this style were adopted by all the existing blind institutions. Mr. Alston undertook the printing of these books: they have generally been known by the name of "Alston's type." Of course good intentions were at the bottom of all this, but good intentions, unaided by experience and the right kind of intelligence, will not always carry us to the desired haven. I think I have heard that they are proverbial for paving a place where it would be considered unnecessary to wear top coats.



Among the competitors was Alexander Hay, a blind gentleman of high intellectual attainments. He had designed an alphabet of a purely arbitrary character and simple form. I have not been able to get a copy of this, and am therefore unable to speak from personal examination. I have no doubt, however, that as the production of an intelligent blind person it is likely to have surpassed the others in the qualities most desirable, but as it has generally been the custom to treat the blind as imbeciles, it is no wonder that this gentleman's claim to public attention was ignored. The reason given for adopting the roman letter was that as the blind will have the sighted for instructors, it is necessary to use an alphabet with which the latter are familiar. I lately read a report of a meeting held in Worcester some years ago in support of the claims of a society for providing cheap literature for the blind, and here the speakers said they had adopted the roman letter because it would be best understood by the sighted, and in a pamphlet published by E. Foster, an official of the Leicester Institute, he also argues that it will be better to adopt this letter, because it will be understood by the ordinary schoolmaster. I may mention here that the lower-case roman letter is generally used in all the American institutions, having been adopted by Dr. Howe, of Boston, U.S., in 1833, for the same reason. There is only one condition wanted to make all this reasoning perfect, that condition being that the blind should have as much sight as other people; but as this condition is wanting, I must demur to the interests of the blind being sacrificed to the indolence of the schoolmaster, when a moderate amount of application will make him acquainted with any simple alphabet. I am aware that young children with very small and delicate fingers are found to read this type with tolerable ease, but the case is very different with the adult. The whole history of relief type up to this time presents a series of blunders, the natural result of the judgment of the blind being ignored. When

will the sighted learn that the sense of touch demands a totally different treatment from that of sight, and that the blind themselves are the only competent judges? When the St. John's Wood Society was established in 1838, its founders appear to have had more wisdom, for they discarded all the existing systems and adopted a new one known as Lucas's. This is simply a system of stenography, with the usual simple forms of character used in short-hand. This was certainly an advance in the right direction, and the only objection I have heard against it is that the abbreviations used were unsystematic, therefore uncertain. Another system was the invention of a Mr. Frere, and is a phonetic short-hand. I find those who have mastered it speak highly of it, and from some examination I have given to it I am disposed to think it has many advantages. Bearing in mind however that large numbers of the blind are not only illiterate and dull, but also advanced in age, and dislike much trouble in learning, I think Moon's will generally be preferred for its extreme simplicity. This latter system was invented about 20 years ago by a Mr. W. Moon, a native of Brighton, who is totally blind, and I believe has been so all his life. The characters used are a combination of Frere's and the simpler forms of the roman letters. In point of simplicity and easy reading, it is certainly the best that has been given to the blind, and is another proof that only the blind thoroughly understand the wants of their class. This system is used by the Home Teaching Societies, and the Bible in this type has been printed in several languages. The only objection I see to it is the great bulk of its volumes. It is probable that the more intelligent of the blind will demand something less cumbrous, but this will only be produced when the mature mind and calm judgment of the most intellectual of the blind are brought to bear upon it; we must "learn to labour and to wait."

I will now describe the invention of Louis Braille as well as I can without the aid of diagrams. There



is a wooden frame with a number of grooves; fitting into these grooves is a tongue-piece to which is attached two metal plates connected together by a swivel hinge. In the upper plate are a number of parallelogram openings, and corresponding to each of these openings there will be found six small round holes in the under plate. The paper being fixed between these two plates, may be pressed into the round holes with a steel point or style; this raises a corresponding boss or elevation on the opposite side of the paper, which can be distinctly felt with the finger. Certain variations of these six points are made to represent, not only all the letters of the alphabet, but many syllables and short words in common use, and by an ingenious device are also made to represent numbers and punctuation, and also musical notes. There is no doubt the inventor must have spent many years in thinking out and perfecting his design; it cannot be too highly praised, and the blind owe him a deep debt of gratitude, for it enables them to record and preserve their own thoughts, which they can always refer to without sighted assistance. I shall always be ready to give gratuitous instruction in it to any of the blind who may desire it. The frames may be purchased at a cheap rate of the Red Lion-square Society, where also gratuitous instruction may be obtained.

This invention was introduced into public notice in Paris about 1839, and in this country in 1852.

Let me remind the reader that only the blind thoroughly understand the wants of their class, and that it is because Louis Braille and W. Moon are themselves blind that their inventions are the most useful that the world has yet seen. Ninety-two years have now elapsed since the first book in relief type was produced by Valentine Haüy, and we have still to lament the fact that scarcely anything beyond the Bible is yet accessible to the blind. In Shakespeare's play of the "Merchant of Venice," Shylock is made to say, "Hath not a Jew senses, passions, and feelings like other men? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If

you tickle us do we not laugh? Are we not warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter?" &c. I will use a similar argument, and say, Have not the blind the same intellectual taste, or the same love of the poetic and beautiful as other men; and why should the cruel sentence be passed upon them, that if they wish to read for themselves, they shall be confined to the Bible? A few other books have been produced in Moon's type; they are mostly of a sectarian kind, with some biographies of a very meagre character. The History of England was commenced some years ago, but stopped at the reign of King John. "The Merchant of Venice," some selections from the poet Shelley, and a few other books were produced some years ago by the Worcester Society, but as the roman type was adopted, which is so unfit for the sense of touch, they might just as well not have been in existence.

To me it seems a national disgrace when I reflect that not one of our British poets, not a single essay by any original thinker, nor a page of Shakespeare, except that just mentioned, is accessible to the blind by this means.

There are various Bible-classes held in different parts of the Metropolis, but only one or two classes where secular reading is permitted. I must here enter my protest against the ridiculous rubbish that is continually talked to and at the blind. At one of these meetings a rev. gentleman said, "The blind were to be envied; they led a calm, peaceful and happy life; they have the Bible to read, and that was all that any human being need wish." At another meeting, a noble lord who presided said, "The blind might be thankful they were spared the temptations to which other people were exposed." The logical outcome of this would be that the Creator must have made a mistake in giving anybody eyes; but to this conclusion the brains of his lordship were evidently not capable of reaching. At a blind tea-party, presided over by the rector of one of the most intelligent districts at the west-end of London, the



following idiotic story was told by the chairman :—"I knew a woman who, although both blind and poor, was very happy, for she could read God's Holy Word with her fingers, and that was sufficient for her; but her hands became paralysed and she could no longer do this, and said to the minister, 'You had better take the book and give it to some other blind person who can read it, but before I part with it I will kiss it;' and putting it up to her lips she found to her great joy that she could read the letters with her lips, and she was so thankful that although God had taken away the use of her hands, she was still able to read His Holy Word with her lips."

The rev. gentleman never explained how the woman could lift the book to her lips if her hands were paralysed. I refrain from mentioning this gentleman's name from feelings of delicacy, but should this meet his eye, I ask him to remember that he would not dare to talk such rubbish to any but the blind. I claim protection for my unfortunate brethren from such an insult to their understandings. They are generally so crushed and degraded and so necessitous that they dare not complain, but are compelled to lick the hand that feeds them.

Another class of speakers, who seem to be specially selected because they know nothing of the subject, are often very amusing, for they indulge in poetic flights about the wonderful compensation that nature provides; the marvellous power of touch, the acute sense of hearing, the habitual cheerfulness, &c. All this is so much doubtful paper, drawn on the bank of imagination. It would be refused payment if presented at the bank of reality.

The subject of pensions is most important, but I have only space for a few brief remarks. Many benevolent persons have from time to time left large sums of money with directions that the interest thereof should be applied in the payment of small pensions to the blind. The bequests are all located in London, and are mostly held by the City Companies, the pen-



sions varying in amount from £3 up to £20, the great majority being for £10. 170 pensions of this amount are annually paid by the Painters' Company, and 695 by the Governors of Christ's Hospital. The latter are trustees for a very large sum of money, the accumulated results of several bequests, the interest of which annually amounts to £7522. The first of these bequests was left in 1774, by the Rev. W. Hetherington, for the payment of fifty of these pensions, and to this bequest he attached some very stringent conditions. The applicant was ineligible if he had been a soldier or sailor, a day-labourer or a domestic servant, if he had ever fiddled at a fair, if he had ever received parochial relief, if he had ever turned a mangle or any other wheel, and if he had ever followed any handicraft employment. The trustees have attached the same conditions to all the other bequests that have followed, and (this is a hardship the blind have a right to complain of) the applicant must not be less than sixty-one years of age.

One remarkable bequest was left by the late Charles Day, the blacking merchant. That gentleman, who was himself blind during the latter part of his life, left the munificent sum of £100,000, the interest thereof to be applied in pensions of £12, £16, and £20 a year. Unlike all other bequests, this one is open to the blind from the age of twenty-one. 240 persons enjoy the benefit of its provisions. 120 receive £12, 62 £16, and 49 £20 per annum. I believe this trust to be well and faithfully administered, but how little it does towards the actual want may be inferred from the fact that the trustees have more than 5000 names on their books. The following memorable words, used by Mr. Day in reference to his bequest deserve special attention:—"Not one penny of this money is to be expended in bricks and mortar in erecting a prison for the blind; they are too much imprisoned already."

The condition attached to nearly all these pensions, that the applicant must never have received parochial relief, is very hard; its cruelty is exemplified in the

following case, which occurred some years ago, but has lately been reported to me. A man named Phillip Davis was brought before the Lord Mayor, charged with annoying the secretary of the Cordwainer's Company, and for this offence he was sent to prison. The poor fellow's case was very pitiable. He had become totally blind, and had succeeded in getting a pension of £5 from the above Company. The imprisonment that blindness inflicts upon an active mind had the effect, in his case, of causing mental derangement; in this condition he was, by order of the parochial authority, removed to the Hanwell Lunatic Asylum. The judicious treatment received there having somewhat restored the balance of his mind, he was set at liberty. On applying for his pension, he was informed that it was stopped because he had become a pauper by entering the County Lunatic Asylum. Smarting under such atrocious cruelty, it is no wonder that he became abusive.

I am glad to be able to point to one exception to this rule in the Protestant Blind Pension Society, which from a small beginning has been gradually enlarging its action and extending its sphere of usefulness. 220 blind persons are now on the books of the society, who receive monthly pensions, ranging from 5s. to 25s., the amount increasing with the age of the recipient. The pensioners are elected by the votes of the subscribers, each half-guinea giving one vote, and the fact of having at any time received parochial relief is no barrier to the pension. All the money subscribed, after deducting the necessary expenses of printing, does really go to the blind, for there is no paid official except a collector, whose poundage is generally under £5 per annum. The hon. secretary is Mr. S. G. Watson, Stockbroker, Bartholomew-house, Bartholomew-lane, City.

The Jews have established a fund from which any indigent Jew becoming blind will, without trouble or delay, receive a pension of 8s. per week. This is just sufficient to prevent the breaking up of home ties, and much misery is thereby avoided, and it is 16s. more in



the year (with two single exceptions) than the highest of those given to Christians. I ask : When will Christians do likewise ?

Those who desire full information on the subject of pensions, are referred to a most useful work, "Annuities for the Blind," by E. Johnson, published this year by H. Roberts, Arabella-row, Pimlico, price 1s. According to that authority, the total amount paid last year in pensions was £20,497 6s., the total number of recipients being 2263. This is only a small drop in the great ocean of want. Let us hope that the benevolence of the present will supplement that of the past, and that more will be done in this direction, and without conditions that are an insult to common sense and a disgrace to humanity. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the average cost of distributing these pensions is under 10 per cent., and affords a striking contrast to the cost of relieving the blind through the medium of institutions where these proportions would often be reversed, the blind getting the 10 per cent., and all the other going to expenses. Although blindness is certainly one of the heaviest afflictions that can befall humanity, and would seem at first to paralyze every effort, we yet meet with numerous instances of the triumphs of genius over it, and of lives which, although passed in darkness, are still resplendent with intellectual lustre. There is scarcely any department of learning or skill in which the blind have not distinguished themselves and left their "footprints on the sands of time." Two of the greatest poems the world has ever seen are the compositions of blind men, the "Iliad" of Homer, and the "Paradise Lost" of Milton. Poets of a humbler type, but of great merit, are too common for me even to mention their names. An "Ode to Blindness," most beautiful and pathetic, was the composition of Edward Rushton, who lost his sight under an attack of fever while serving as mate on board ship. He afterwards became editor of a local newspaper in Liverpool, and also carried on the trade of a bookseller.



In mathematics, besides a host of minor celebrities, we have the illustrious names of Nicolas Sanderson and Leonard Euler. The former, although of humble origin, being the son of an exciseman, was elected to the professor's chair in Cambridge University, which he held till the time of his death. Euler was a corresponding member of nearly every learned society in Europe. After he became blind, he performed some of the most difficult and intricate astronomical calculations, and enriched the Academies of Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg with papers of great value. As a naturalist we have had Francis Huber, the celebrated blind philosopher of Geneva. As a botanist, John Gough, of Kendall. This gentleman not only attained eminent rank as a botanist, but also had high attainments in zoology, experimental philosophy, and mathematics. Dr. Henry Moyes, blind from the age of four years, became a celebrated lecturer on natural and experimental philosophy. There have been many blind divines; one of the most noted being Dr. Thomas Blacklock, the son of a bricklayer, and who took the degree of D.D. in the Edinburgh University. In the same University, the professor's chair in the department of history was filled for many years by William Jamaieson, who had been blind from his youth.

About seven or eight years ago, I had the pleasure of hearing a very admirable lecture from the Rev. W. Milburn. I am informed that he is pastor over a large congregation in America, and although quite blind, he performs the duties of that office with credit to himself and satisfaction to his flock.

In Edinburgh, Alexander Hay, a blind gentleman of high intellectual attainments, supported himself and family as a teacher of languages. In John Holland, of Manchester, we have an instance of a very successful teacher and schoolmaster. As a musical composer, John Stanley, author of the oratorio of "Jephtha." As an able magistrate, Sir John Fielding, of London. As a judge, Mr. Justice Pennefather, of Dublin. As

a traveller and explorer, the celebrated James Holman, R.N. As a warrior, the famous Zisca, the patriot and reformer of Bohemia. Two very remarkable blind men were John Metcalf, of Knaresboro, and James Willson, of Belfast; remarkable because, born and reared in the midst of poverty, and without any of the advantages which birth, social position, and education can confer, yet by energy, perseverance, and industry, they achieved for themselves honourable success in life. I regret I have not space for full details of their lives, which are very instructive, and prove the great value of home and social life. I hope to be able to print another pamphlet on "The Genius of the Blind, and the Lessons to be learnt from it." One of the most useful and intellectual men in the House of Commons is Professor Fawcett, who is totally blind; and there is a blind gentleman named Connolly, living in Gower-street, who gains an honourable and independent living as a private tutor. He is the son of a tradesman in the Walworth-road, and after a certain amount of home education, he entered the London University, where he obtained the degree of B.A. Many useful mechanical inventions have come from the blind, among which may be mentioned a wonderful machine for printing music, exhibited in Hyde-park in 1851, the invention of M. Foucault, a blind Frenchman. I might go on multiplying such instances, but I have said enough to prove that the highest intellectual acquirements are within reach of the blind, provided only that society furnishes them with the proper conditions. I have examined the early biographies of nearly all the persons whose names I have given, and I have found that the whole of them were educated in ordinary schools in company with the sighted, and enjoyed the genial influences of home and social life. None of them had to endure the misery of being exiled from the world, which modern stupidity has inflicted on many others.

All that can be taught in the exile school can be taught much better in the social school. All that can



be taught in the exile workshop may be taught much better in the social workshop; and to erect or rent a large building, with an expensive staff of officials, for the purpose of teaching a few blind persons to make very indifferent baskets, is about as ridiculous as it would be for the mistress of an ordinary household to erect a costly steam-engine, and engage the services of an engineer and stoker, for the express purpose of peeling potatoes for the family dinner.

Exile institutions have many evils. They are costly in practice; they must increase the misery of the blind by adding to the imprisonment that nature has already put upon them. They have a direct tendency to impair and deteriorate both the physical and mental powers; they have encouraged selfishness and unnatural conduct in the parents and relations of the blind, who have thus got rid of the unfortunate instead of helping him to self-support, and this has re-acted upon society generally, and led to the present general indifference to the claims of that unfortunate class who as citizens have a right to all the advantages that society can confer. The blind have a right to partake in all the educational endowments of the country, in common with the sighted. They have also a right to some voice in the distribution of the large sums of money annually collected for their welfare. On the subject of the mental deterioration of the blind, I give the following quotation from a work entitled "Contributions to Social Pathology," published about 1862:

"Think of the deterioration of the mental powers of the blind, famished for the want of the necessary amount of perception, writhing in the obstructed action of imprisonment, and wasting away for the want of motive and opportunity. The mental powers of the felon are protected from the evil effects of too much silence and isolation by the daily inspection of the prison governor, the chaplain, the medical man, and the turnkeys, whilst he is animated by the hope of restoration to social life after the expiration of his sentence; but who has thought hitherto of inspecting



and reporting on the mental deterioration of the blind, suffering from too much silence and isolation, aggravated by darkness, and imprisoned, not for months, but for years, without any hope of restoration to society. On the contrary, most of those who obtrude themselves on the public as collectors for pet systems, under the guise of friends of the blind, never allude to this question (their mental necessities), which is the true key to the whole subject, whether it be approached from a physical, intellectual, social, or religious point of view.

“How long will it be before medical writers will do their share of befriending the blind, by pointing out that to sustain the healthy current of thought, a certain amount and quality of truth-conveying impressions are as necessary through the ear as of pure air through the lungs to fit the blood for its destined duty, and as the heart will not contract without its necessary stimulus of oxygen, so the human will in the blind will only act when it has derived confidence from the adequate supply of truth. For this supply of life-sustaining element each blind person must depend on the circle of friends on whom he has a claim, and their denial of it, or their substitution of the poison of falsehood or deception, will sooner or later inevitably do its work.

“The thoughtless and the insufficiently educated must not reproach the blind with the assertion that “they have plenty of time to think,” when the materials for thought have been long exhausted, and when they have no longer the hope of application. The voluntary retirement of the five-sensed, congested with facts or with sight for observation, for the purpose of undisturbed reflection, animated by the hope of a return to application, may be compared to digestion, but the compulsory and prolonged isolation of the blind, without the materials for thought, and without the hope of return to society, can be compared to nothing else but starvation.”

The author of the foregoing is Mr. John Bird, who,

being attacked by amourosis at thirty-two years of age, was forced to relinquish his profession as a surgeon, and has laboured incessantly to promote higher views respecting the education, treatment, and capabilities of the blind. Since the issue of my first essay on this subject, I have had the advantage of making his acquaintance, and am greatly indebted to him for much valuable information. It is somewhat remarkable that I had previously arrived at very similar conclusions respecting the costliness and uselessness of exile institutions. I am sorry to say that although he has given time, money, and brains to this question from the purest motives, he has been misrepresented and much maligned because, with the true dignity of an educated gentleman, he has refused to pander to the narrow views of those having vested interest in the present system with its monstrous waste of money and most wretched results. I suppose no one in the entire kingdom possesses a deeper knowledge of every phase of this subject, and ideas promulgated by him many years ago, are now being adopted.

Another gentleman whose name should be mentioned with respect as one who labours most earnestly (although in a different direction) for the welfare of the blind, is Dr. Armitage, of 33, Cambridge-square. He has established an agency for supplying the blind at cost price with writing-frames and other educational apparatus. He is himself partially blind.

At Greenock and Glasgow, in Scotland, blind children are being educated in social schools with the best results, but notwithstanding this good example, the Edinburgh people have lately been erecting another exile institution at a cost of nearly £20,000. So little does this part of the subject seem to be understood, that large legacies are still received by the St. George's exile school, and a proposition has been started, and I believe is being carried out, for erecting another institution a short distance from London, in which blind children under ten years of age are to be immured. I should have thought that any intelligent



person would at once see that the proper place for any child of such tender years, but especially a blind one, should be with its mother, and in the event of that parent being removed by death, it should be placed with some respectable woman in the same rank of life. This would not only be better for the child, but the cost would be about one fourth of the amount incurred in an exile institution. This course was adopted in the case of James Willson, of Belfast, already referred to. He lost both parents at the age of four years. His useful life is a practical lesson, and one incident I will relate, as it shows how a little thoughtful consideration might often give a better supply of intellectual food to the blind. When about eighteen, he heard that a reading-class and book-club was about to be formed, and on applying for admission, its promoters (very much to their credit) said that as he was blind, they knew his earnings would be less than theirs, and they therefore admitted him to all the privileges of membership without the payment of any fee. [Here he met with an earnest friend, who offered to read to him all the books he might select, and for several years this pair passed each evening in this manner. I recommend this to the consideration of those who have power to help the blind in this respect, and would also suggest as a general rule for free admission to all instructive lectures and debates. With one entrance to wisdom quite shut out, they need much more than others a much larger supply through the ear, but this is too generally denied. Like Goethe in his dying moment, they cry out "Light, more light!" but that cry is too often in vain. I understand that there are at present between twenty and thirty blind children in the Metropolitan Board Schools, but their teaching has been handed over to the Home Teaching Society. I am quite sure so intelligent a body as the London School Board will soon see that this is a mistake, and that it is their business to appoint the requisite instructors, and here I see a field for the intellectual employment of the blind. When blind children



are brought up with sighted companions of their own age and rank, not only will home ties be preserved, but they will also form friendships which will continue in after life, and be the means of providing them with suitable employment. The blind are capable of filling many useful positions in life if only fair play is afforded them, and it is in society, and not out of it, that they can alone be useful; it is in society, and not out of it, that they are able to realize any pleasure in life. And now, in a few concluding words, let me ask the reader to realize, if he can, the crushing sense of desolation and misery which must be felt when first the conviction comes to the mind that the sight is gone for ever. Henceforth all is changed, and every charm in life seems to have departed. No more shall we look upon the faces of those we love, or see the bright sparkles of the eye, or the winning smile that greets our approach. No more to look upon the beautiful face of nature, or see the ethereal blue above, or the green verdure beneath; the sparkling ripple of the water, or the bright colours of the flowers, and all the innumerable varieties of hue and tint that make up the charm of a lovely landscape. The beautiful in art is also lost, for what are pictures to those who cannot see! The best companions are good books, and these are now parted from us. Books that enable us to commune with the greatest minds of all ages, and bring to humble homes the highest thoughts and noblest aspirations of the world's greatest men. I have felt all this myself, and know how terrible it is; and I ask, in the name of common humanity, is it not the duty of society to lighten and ameliorate by every means the doom of those so terribly afflicted, especially where, as is often the case, blindness brings with it all the bitterness of the most abject poverty. It seems to me to be the duty of our representatives in Parliament to move for a Commission of Enquiry into the condition of the blind. If this were granted and properly conducted, it would a "tale unfold to harrow up the soul," and open up such a revelation, not only of

human misery, but also of wasted resources, that would be quite appalling, and the ignorance of society on this subject would be considerably lessened. Let society remember that it must not shirk its duty to the blind, and if it does not perform that duty by training them to habits of self-support by furnishing them with the proper means, it will have to pay the penalty by keeping them as paupers. The former course is not only dictated by the soundest principles of political economy, but also by the higher considerations of charity, humanity, and justice.

Oh, think what joys to you are given,  
Which they can never hope to share;  
To view the bright expanse of heaven,  
And all the wondrous glories there.

For them the morning's rosy light  
In vain the glowing east o'erspreads;  
For them the empress of the night  
In vain her silvery lustre sheds.

The scented blossoms of the spring  
In vain their silken leaves unfold,  
And o'er each mead profusely fling  
Their varied tints of living gold.

In vain the twilight shade descends  
In magic softness, pure, serene;  
In vain the eye of evening lends  
Its dewy light to gild the scene.

## “A Plea for the Blind.”

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*The following review of Mr. Haswell's pamphlet from the pen of a well-known writer in the "Weekly Times," is by permission reprinted from the number of January 14th, 1877, for which valuable contribution to their cause very many Blind persons who have heard it read, as well as Mr. Haswell himself feel deeply indebted.*

TO THE EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY TIMES.

SIR,

Amongst the severe afflictions which fall heaviest upon the working class must be reckoned that of blindness, to which they are, from the nature of many of their trades, much exposed. At the last census, the number of blind persons in the British islands amounted to 31,159; and, as they have been found to increase in certain proportions as population grows, their ranks now, in all probability, contain many hundreds more. Of this large number it is reckoned by Mr. Haswell, whose excellent pamphlet upon the subject is before me, that at least 22,000 must subsist upon charity, and are placed by him in the pauper class. It is curious to learn that blindness is more prevalent in agricultural than in manufacturing districts, and that Ireland has about one blind person to 864 of the whole population, while the general average is about one in a thousand. Many manufacturing trades must render those



who work at them more liable to accidents causing injury to sight than agricultural pursuits ; but as the latter excel in blindness, I suppose the bad state of cottages, and exposure to weather, have something to do with it. Few children are born blind, so that most of the sufferers charity has to relieve, enjoyed a seeing period before the blind one came on. Mr. Haswell, who now follows Mr. Bird, the well-known blind surgeon, in advocating the cause of his fellow-sufferers, like that gentleman, lost his sight at mature age, and has recently devoted much time to collecting information respecting the various institutions that profess to deal with the infirmity, and to the exposure of their defects. Mr. Bird, many years ago, uttered his protest against what he called the "exile system" of treating blind folks—that is, exiling them from the every-day life of the active, seeing people, and making them miserable by shutting them up with others in the same plight as themselves. Those who have lost a sense have the greatest need of constant intercourse with the more fortunate possessors of all the senses, and asylums for their incarceration, in doleful groups, are melancholy mistakes. If a member of a well-to-do family loses his sight, relations and friends are constantly at hand to supply the deficiency as far as they are able. Day by day they hear what seeing people are about. By conversation, and being read to, they are kept well up with the world's doings, and there is little cause for that dwindling and shrinking of the mental faculties that the poor blind suffer in mis-called "Homes." Mr. Haswell says that a considerable percentage of blind people go mad under this treatment, and I can well believe it.

Amongst the mistakes made by the seeing people in providing for the non-seeing, foremost stands wasting

money in buildings in which they are to suffer a sort of almsgiving—I cannot call it charitable—imprisonment, and then wasting more money in salaries to secretaries, managers, masters, mistresses, matrons, and other functionaries.

Mr. Haswell quotes a “Guide to the Charities for the Blind,” by Mansfield Turner, to the effect that the total number of “blind institutions”—not a bad name for most of them—in the United Kingdom, is between fifty and sixty. Exclusive of those in the metropolis, he reckons forty-six, with an aggregate income of £82,349 ; “while the total number of blind persons educated, employed, and relieved by them, is only 1,113 !” This shows the cost per head per annum to be over £73. It is quite clear that such a sum, judiciously distributed without any brick-and-mortar secretary, and other official sponge, to suck it up, would enable at least double the number of blind persons to get comfortable board and lodging in families who could see, and would help them with their sight. Not only is at least half this money wasted, but the half the blind obtain some benefit from is not spent in the best mode for their well-being.

The St. George’s School for Indigent Blind, in Southwark, comes under some sharp criticism from Mr. Haswell. He pronounces its balance sheets very confusing, but, upon Mansfield Turner’s authority, gives its income as far back as 1869, as £10,237. The object of this Institution is to receive pupils from ten to twenty years old, educate them, and teach them some handicraft, or, to those who show talent for it, music. As far as Mr. Haswell can ascertain, each pupil costs about £63 per annum, which, reckoning the average time of remaining in the establishment is six and a half years, makes a total of £409. In

return for this great outlay, the results seem truly miserable. "Of the total number who left in 1873, only seven were found able to earn anything, and the average earnings of the seven were only 7s. 6d. a week, while the majority are so helpless as to earn nothing." Unless the managers of this concern can prove these figures to be monstrously wrong, it is plain that selling off the whole thing, and applying the interest of the proceeds in well-distributed pensions, would be a charitable and useful proceeding.

The London Association for Teaching the Blind to Read, and for Training them in Industrial Occupations, seems much more economically arranged ; but Mr. Haswell complains that it is on the "exile system, which experience has shown does not fully develop the powers of the blind."

The London Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind seem also to need investigation. Mr. Haswell complains that when he asked the Secretary of this Institution for a Report, telling him he was writing on the subject, it was refused, on the plea that the manager was unwell ; but by referring to an abstract, published in the *London Mirror*, 6th June, 1874, he found that at that date the establishment had ninety-one workers, who appeared to earn about 9s. a week, and to have cost about £91 8s. 6d. each. He says :—"Although the number employed in the workshops is only thirty-seven, the cost of materials and goods has reached the astounding sum of £3,340. . . . The calamity of the afflicted is made a pretence for soliciting the contributions of the benevolent, and, with the capital thus raised, a large trading establishment is carried on, in which goods in large quantities are bought ready made, and sold to the public as the product of the blind." A careful inquiry into this Institution is evidently desirable, and it is only by accurate balance sheets,



drawn up, not according to the craft of the accountants, but such as merchants and manufacturers, prepare for their own information, that the real working can be shown. I should not either absolve or condemn this concern without being in possession of all the facts ; but, as a general principle, I should regard a trading charity as a mistake.

The Alexandra Institution for Improving the Condition of the Blind, now happily defunct, struck Mr. Haswell as having “a great deal of piety infused in its Report,” from which he gathered that about £2,000 were expended in a process that resulted in paying about 3s. a week wages to thirty-one persons. In another year, ending April, 1873, the receipts of the concern were £2,848, the workers in it thirty-nine, their wages about 3s. 2d. a week, and their annual cost over £73. The deceased Institution had the advantage of being patronised by Prince Teck, assisted by Lords and Bishops, all, no doubt, believing they were doing good ; and I only cite Mr. Haswell’s account of it as a warning to persons of influence, who ought to be quite sure the charity schemes they support are sound.

The Surrey Association for the Blind quite “refreshed” Mr. Haswell by the honesty and explicit character of its Report. The cost of its workers is much less than at other institutions, but still amounts to £57 6s. 8d. Its nine blind adult workers get about £20 a year each. Putting three of the industrial institutions together, Mr. Haswell finds the average weekly wage of their blind workers to be 7s. 4d. and the average cost of each £84 0s. 8d.

It is quite plain that an inquiry into the condition and treatment of the blind, and into the working of various plans and institutions, is highly desirable. I shall show further reason for this, and would suggest a Royal Commission.

The only sort of Society for relieving blind people that seems to me perfectly satisfactory is the Protestant Blind Pension Society, which wastes no money, but applies every farthing it receives, deducting very small and quite unavoidable expenses, to its avowed object. It gives pensions from 5s. to 25s. a month to indigent blind persons, and has now more than 200 upon its list. Mr. S. G. Watson, of Bartholomew House, City, is the honorary secretary ; and as I have known the working of this real charity for many years, I do not hesitate to recommend it, not only as deserving support, but as a model for others that may be started. If blind people are to be taught, let them, as Mr. Bird long since pointed out, have the advantage of the stimulus and companionship of sighted fellow-pupils. To teach them some handicraft, it is by no means necessary to erect a special building for their prison-house. What they can learn they can acquire in company with ordinary folks, and without the aggravation of their deprivation and discomfort that is occasioned when they are huddled together out of the way of common intercourse with other human beings.

There is one more branch of this blind subject I must allude to before concluding, and that is the fallacies connected with printing for those who cannot see. A great deal of compassion is excited in many benevolent circles by the spectacle of a blind man fumbling with his fingers over a dingy page with raised characters, and reciting aloud some Scripture words. A performance of this sort is usually taken to indicate that the printing employed is really adapted to its purpose, and that blind men can not only read it, but are supplied with books. Now, the fact is, that most of these printing plans do not answer. They are not found to be convenient in practice, and in most

cases the books are too bulky, too dear, and too limited in their subjects. If, after long practice, a blind man can only read, say the Gospel of St. John, the question arises whether he could not have learnt it by heart with less time and trouble, with the assistance of sighted persons as his teachers. Mr. Haswell thinks Moon's system will be found the best, but this is a matter for inquiry ; all I wish to enforce is that money should not be wasted upon comparatively useless projects. A method devised by Louis Braille is highly commended by Mr. Haswell. It is carried out by an apparatus in a frame, sold cheaply by the Red Lion Square Society, by which blind people can produce a kind of embossed writing, not difficult to make, and easy for them to read.

With regard to the possibilities of blind people being able to earn their own living, it is not likely that many can compete with sighted folks ; but their best chances are spoilt by the "exile system." Many people think that, as a necessary consequence of losing sight, other faculties are sharpened, but this is not the case ; and a general stupefaction is likely to occur unless the afflicted can enjoy the daily help of their more fortunate fellow-creatures.

LITTLEJOHN.

This Pamphlet so favourably reviewed  
 "THE SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE BLIND,"  
 AN ESSAY BY D. O. HASWELL,

May be had of the Author, post-free on receipt of Six  
 Stamps.

49, Greek Street, Soho, London, W.

*G. PULMAN, Printer, 24, Thayer Street, Manchester Square, W.*



The Society referred to on page 6, the Protestant **BLIND PENSION SOCIETY** bases its appeal for further aid on the following grounds :—

That of the 31,159 Blind in the United Kingdom, by far the greater majority become blind after reaching manhood. That the very few trades which the blind *can attempt* are of the least remunerative kind. That in mat-making they are undersold by convict labour, in brush-filling by *sighted labour* and in basket making by foreign importers, whilst in chair-caning they cannot compete with the more rapid work of the *Sighted*.

The services of every officer, (*the Collector excepted,*) are rendered gratuitously. At present the Pensions are small, nevertheless “*as a certainty*” they are most welcome to the neglected or deserted Blind, to the aged, especially to those who in their isolation have been *over-worked* in the hard struggle of *ill-paid* labour, and to none more than to those who have *out-lived their friends*; and this appeal is made in the hope that a benevolent public will enable them to increase the amount of the monthly Pension as well as the number of pensioners.

A Donation of Five Guineas, or an Annual Subscription of 10/6 entitles such subscriber to one vote at each half-yearly Election in May and November.

*Treasurer ;*

T. Pocock, Esq., 235, Southwark Bridge Road, S.E.

H. DODSON, Esq., Cambridge Lodge, Penge Lane, Sydenham

*Honorary Secretary.*

S. G. WATSON, Esq., Bartholomew House, Bartholomew Lane, E.C.

N.B.—Being compelled by the sad necessities of their case to apply for Parochial Relief does not disqualify the blind from becoming Pensioners on this Charity.

[See page 6.]



